



# The Love Chase.

HENRY J. POOD.

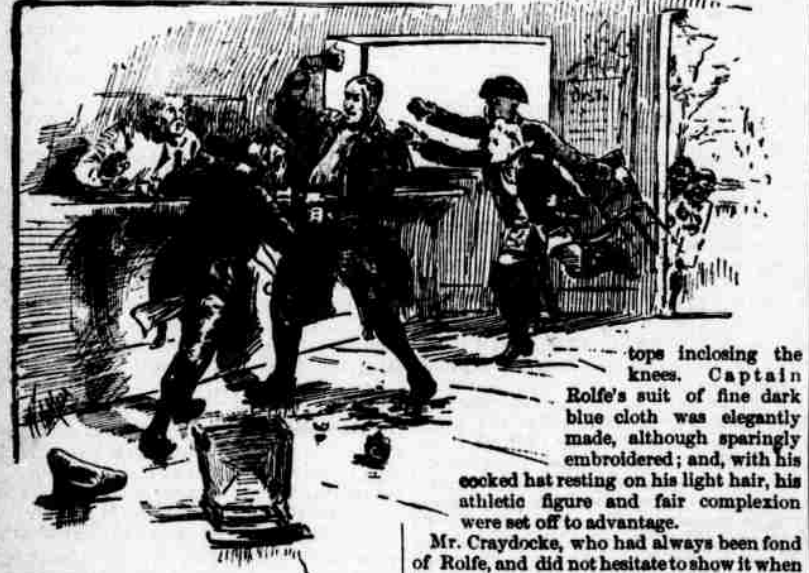
(CONCLUDED.)

"Give me some brandy, landlord," rang out a strong, calm voice at his elbow. Lord Creighton wheeled around and saw Rolfe leaning nonchalantly against the bar, regarding him with a mocking, insolent smile.

"Well, my lord," said Rolfe, "have you come to apologize for your impudent behavior at the manor-house?"

Even if Lord Creighton had been a mild-tempered man, he could not have endured this. The social gulf between a person of quality and a redemptioner was wide and deep, and for the latter to assume any haughtiness of mien toward the former was of itself intolerable insolence. Rolfe's every look and tone that day had been a maddening insult to Lord Creighton. With swollen veins, a blood-red face and limbs that shook with passion, he hurled himself on Rolfe, who, taken on his flank, and while still in his lounging attitude, was nearly overthrown. If Creighton was in a hot rage, Rolfe was in a cold, malignant one that was more dangerous because it did not strike blindly. Mere fistfights were too small a thing for Lord Creighton's magnificent resentment. Drawing a hunting-knife, he cut at one of Rolfe's ears, but his unsteady hand made a long gash across Rolfe's temple. That was offense enough. Crash went the brandy bottle over my lord's head, and there was a splatter of glass and blood. The jagged remnant that was left in Rolfe's hand again descended on my lordship's head and face, cutting long, deep gashes. There was a shout of horror and a tumultuous rush for the combatants. Impelled too much to use his weapon, Rolfe relinquished it and clenched his hands on Creighton's throat, while kicks and blows rained on him from behind. The English bull-dog showed the mettle of his breed; his grip was not broken until his senses left him, and when my lordship was lifted up he was black in the face and senseless.

In those days such cruelties as bull-baiting and bear-baiting were popular sports, and



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walk and standing by her side against the railing. Some conversation followed, but it was marked by effort, and there were pauses of a length unusual where Miss Craydocke was. For once in her life, at least, Miss Edith knew what cowardice was, but she gathered up her faculties and began the attack.

"It is just three years ago since you handed me that beautiful poem of yours."

Rolfe confronted her in a moment, shamefaced and apologetic. He hoped that Miss Edith would forgive the folly and presumption of his conduct then. He had often been deeply chagrined thinking of it, etc., etc.

Oh no, indeed, it was she that must ask forgiveness. And then she made her speech—how she had often reproached herself for her meanness, how she had—oh, so bitterly!—regretted that she should have replied with such rudeness to an honest offer of affection. "For you did love me then, didn't you?" she said in a tone of innocent curiosity.

"I loved you madly!" said Rolfe with fervor and emphasis.

"And now you look back upon that feeling as a folly, and deride it. How men's natures change when they go out into the world!" Rolfe broke down. "God help me," he groaned, "I love you more madly than ever. Forgive my presumption, Miss Edith," he hastily went on, "it shall not trouble you. I shall soon be away from here in the West, and I shall never offend you more."

"You have not offended me," Captain Rolfe, she said in a sweet, low voice.

Rolfe could not speak, for he could only retain his composure by keeping silent. He leaned against the railing and looked at the ruddy windows in the out-buildings, and listened to the merry din that floated on the evening air.

"Let me see the scar on your temple that Lord Creighton made," said Miss Craydocke abruptly.

He stooped over so that she might see it in the light. She laid a gentle hand on his shoulder, and yet he trembled under it, looked at the scar with a little compassionate touch and kissed it. If the soft, dewy touch had been a cord of fire he could not have started more violently. He caught her up in his arms. "Oh, oh!" she said, feeling a delicious shudder at the awful situation, "you hurt me!"

That utterance was not intended to convey a fact, but to produce an effect. The effect was instantaneous. He immediately released her, and stood before her abashed and full of apologies.

"There, that will do," said she, smiling and checking him with a touch of her hand on her arm. "Now, tell me, how would your wife have to live?"

Hope and rapture were in her words. Honest John Rolfe told his tale in a plain, unvarnished way. He described the simple style of living in the Western wilds, the social customs and manners, concealing none of the things that she would be likely to find novel and trying, and concluded with fervent assurances that it would be his constant and highest object in life to make her happy. Earnestness and feeling gave dignity and eloquence to his speech.

She listened with intentness, and when he had finished she put her hand in his and said simply: "I will trust you. Take me with you."

He raised her hand to his lips and then impulsively caught her in his arms. She meekly resigned herself for a blissful moment. Then, extricating herself, she said: "How shall we manage our departure?"

"Way, what do you mean? Will I have to carry you off by stealth?" he said, indignantly.

"You know my father will never consent to my marriage with you," said she, with some hauteur of manner. Could it be that the impassioned lover of three years back had grown so worldly since, and was thinking of her dowry?

And then the pride of the man blazed up. What, come back to the house of his friend and benefactor, and steal his daughter like a thief! No; he would go to Mr. Craydocke and tell him that, in aspiring to his daughter's hand again, he had the assurance of her love. If Mr. Craydocke refused him then, he would get her in spite of them all.

"You forget that I am not yet of age," Rolfe argued with a smile.

Mr. Craydocke was determined to have his own way, and Edith loved and admired him for it. She was crushed, but she liked it.

Edith was correct in her surmise as to the result of Rolfe's action. For the next morning, as soon as Rolfe had made his statement of affairs to him, Mr. Craydocke came storming at her wrathfully, demanding to know the meaning of the outrageous assertion that that audacious fellow had made. Lifting her eyebrows and looking up in great surprise, she said: "Why, father, what did he say to you?"

Mr. Craydocke spluttered it out.

"Why, he must be crazy!" she said, with an air of great astonishment.

"Crazy! He's stark, staring mad! But my house is no place for lunatics. He must get out of here."

Then she began her cajoleries. She pitied the poor fellow. There was nothing dangerous about him, and it would be cruel to turn him out of the house before all the guests. He would leave in a day or two anyhow, and they need never see him again, etc. Of course, she had her own way. But this was not the end of the matter.

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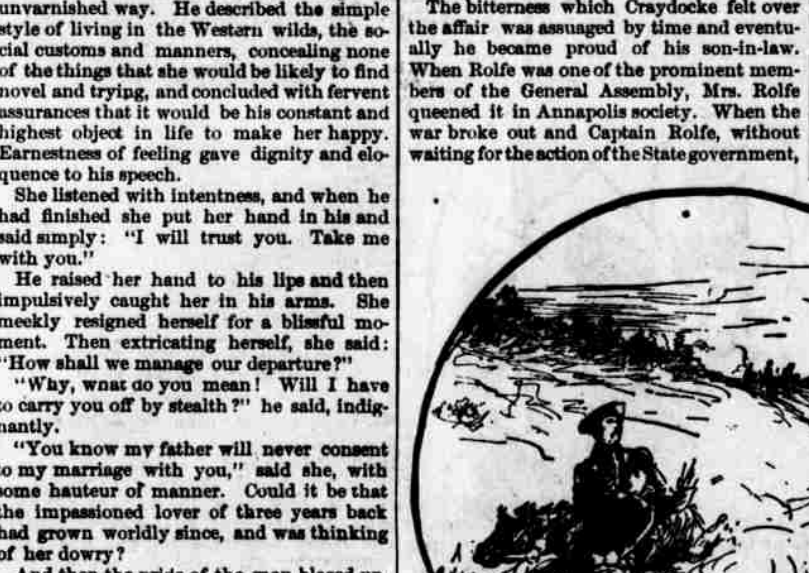
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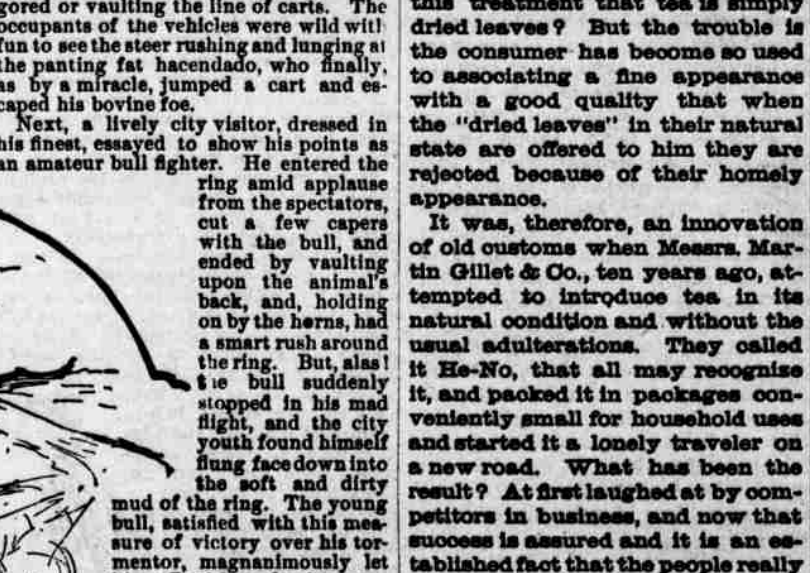
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